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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 22 October 1998, at 10 a.m.

*Chairman*: Mr. Carranza (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Guatemala)

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Agenda item 106: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*)

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*In the absence of Mr. Hachari (Tunisia), Mr. Carranza (Guatemala), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**Agenda item 106: Promotion and protection of the rights of children** (*continued*) (A/53/41, A/53/57, A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/95- S/1998/311, A/53/281, 311 and 482)

1. **Ms. Arystanbekova** (Kazakhstan) said that the large number of States which had ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child was a clear indication of the growing commitment to the cause of protecting and improving the situation of the rights of the child. The situation of children in the world nevertheless remained difficult, and horrifying violations were still taking place. Her delegation supported the efforts of the Commission on Human Rights to implement the Convention, and she stressed the need to increase awareness of the Convention and monitor its application.

2. Her Government, in cooperation with neighbouring countries and with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was working to implement the Convention in Central Asia and Kazakhstan in the context of far-reaching social and economic reforms; the Inter-Parliamentary Conference on the implementation of the Convention held in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, in February 1997 had adopted a Declaration which reflected the obligation to guarantee the well-being of children and women. Her Government had undertaken measures to protect the rights of children in accordance with international law and the Convention in areas such as health and labour, social welfare for the disabled, orphans and children not under the care of their parents and marriage and the family. The long-term strategy for the development of Kazakhstan up to the year 2030 paid particular attention to children, including the physically disabled.

3. She highlighted the role played by UNICEF in the implementation of the country programme, particularly in the Aral Sea environmental-disaster region. She also pointed out the serious problems inherited from the cold-war era and the nuclear tests conducted near Semipalatinsk, which had exposed more than 1.6 million people to harmful radiation. She called for additional resources to assist her Government in its efforts to address the needs of the population of those regions, especially children, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/169 M.

4. She expressed support for the work of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, welcomed international efforts to guarantee those rights, including the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, which declared some abuses of children to be war crimes, and favoured the speedy drafting of the relevant optional protocol to the Convention, which should include a provision banning persons under the age of 18 from military conflicts and establish the highest possible lower age limit for military service. She called on the Security Council to continue to monitor issues directly related to children and their rights, in the context of armed conflicts, humanitarian crises, peacekeeping, sanctions and human rights. She stressed that preventive measures must be taken to deal with the underlying political, economic and social causes of conflicts.

5. With regard to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, she said that growing awareness had revealed the inadequacy of the current legal regime and the mechanisms designed to combat those forms of abuse. She supported the efforts of the Special Rapporteur and suggested that it was essential that the international community should collaborate in taking urgent measures to develop clearer definitions of legal terms, devise situation-specific solutions and compile data on the scale of the problem. In that context, she supported the recommendations set out in the note report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/53/311, annex).

6. She stressed that the rights of children must be an inseparable component of the everyday concerns of States and the world community. It would require a joint effort and firm political will to create a safe and happy future for all the world's children in the coming years.

7. **Ms. Faetanini** (San Marino) stressed her country's concern for the well-being of children and expressed dismay at the harsh reality facing children involved in armed conflict in many other areas of the world. She noted the excellent work done by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in increasing awareness of that issue and welcomed the discussion in the Security Council. She supported the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Convention which would raise the minimum age of involvement in hostilities to 18.

8. With regard to the question of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, she expressed satisfaction at the work of the Special Rapporteur in raising awareness and at the remarkable effects of countless non-governmental organizations. The latter, in cooperation with the media, could rapidly heighten awareness which would lead to action, such as the recent international ban on landmines.



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9. She stressed the need to provide a support network to address the problems of children traumatized by conflict or abuse, in order to help them contribute to society in the future. She stressed that violence was a deadly circle in which today's victims became tomorrow's abusers, undermining society's foundations. Health, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), was a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and she expressed the hope that the World Summit for Children in the year 2001 would help the international community create a world where children could live and grow safely.

10. **Mr. Al-Ethary** (Yemen) said that the creation of a healthy, clean and prosperous environment for the world's children required coordination of efforts at all levels. In too many countries, children's lives were wracked with suffering due to poverty and disease, and were forced by circumstances into hard physical labour.

11. Nonetheless, his delegation remained hopeful that the rights of the child would be strengthened through international cooperation. Yemen was heartened by the work of the United Nations and its agencies, particularly UNICEF.

12. Yemen, which had become a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child at an early date, had established schools, colleges, nurseries and orphanages providing shelter, food, clothing, health care and education to children that had lost one or both parents. The Government was committed to alleviating the suffering of Yemeni children: it had launched a campaign to prevent the employment of children in hard physical labour, and had achieved a drastic reduction in polio.

13. While Yemen had achieved a great deal in terms of children's protection in recent years, many barriers remained. However, Yemen drew on its cultural and religious resources, which eschewed such practices as slavery and the sale of children.

14. The Government's efforts reflected Yemen's commitment to the rights and welfare of children everywhere, without distinction. The international community had a duty to protect children from the ravages of poverty, disease and strife, helping them to build a more prosperous future.

15. **Mrs. Russell** (Barbados), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), expressed satisfaction at the great strides made by UNICEF in achieving the goals of the World Summit for Children. The overall situation was nevertheless alarming, with depressing statistics on child mortality, lack of schooling, child labour, the use of children in armed conflict and the dreadful plight of children with AIDS. The AIDS pandemic had introduced a new phenomenon, that of households headed by children, their parents having died of AIDS. The Caribbean region was especially affected by AIDS, ranking second to Africa in the level of HIV infection. Young people, especially girls, were most affected. With high rates of sexual activity among young people, the region was extremely vulnerable to the spread of the disease among adolescents.

16. She expressed gratitude to UNICEF for its efforts in the areas of reproductive health, the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases among adolescents, and the prevention of teenage pregnancy, and called on UNICEF to mount an even more aggressive information campaign. She also welcomed the principle that pregnant adolescents had a right to education and training. The question of adolescent pregnancy seen from a rights perspective had been the subject of a Latin American and Caribbean workshop held in Jamaica in 1987.

17. Her delegation expressed concern at the problem of poverty which was an obstacle in the struggle for children's and women's rights, with malnutrition being implicated in more than half of all children's deaths and seriously affecting women, the world's caregivers and food providers. Poverty eradication and the advancement of women were vital prerequisites for combating malnutrition, but progress was hampered by the global economic crisis and the decline in official development assistance. Despite economic and social growth in the region, the welfare of children was in danger in many marginalized communities, with common problems such as drug abuse, inadequate educational and health systems, child abuse and poor parenting skills. She noted that UNICEF, along with local partners, would target poor communities in order to facilitate development as part of its 1998–2001 programmes.

18. In spite of the economic recession, CARICOM and non-governmental organizations were working to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child, protect the vulnerable, promote early childhood education and use the media to increase public awareness and give a voice to youth. In some countries, lobbying groups had been created to encourage Governments to take action in those areas.

19. She supported specific action to eliminate such violations of the rights of children as child labour, advocated greater access to education and legal protection, and acknowledged the need for increased monitoring of the practices of child labour as well as the establishment of a code of conduct.

20. She noted that the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, despite the existing international

legal machinery, in many parts of the world, and that children were recruited not only for the purpose of prostitution but also as a cheap source of labour. The task of eliminating such abuses had been made more difficult by the widespread dissemination of child pornography on the Internet, the global economic recession, the instability of countries in transition, natural and man-made disasters, innovative modes of transportation and more sophisticated technology. It was urgent that the international community should act, and her delegation therefore supported the Special Rapporteur's plea that the United Nations should "mainstream" children's issues, as had been done with gender.

21. Implementation of the goals of the Summit by the year 2000 had also been hampered by the growth in internal and cross-border conflicts, which had made international instruments and traditional taboos used to protect the innocent ineffective. Civilians, especially women and children, were the greatest victims. She therefore welcomed the establishment of an International Criminal Court as a means of bringing to justice the perpetrators of war crimes and genocide, and supported the Special Rapporteur's recommendation that concerned Governments and other key international actors should be prepared to use their influence to deny political legitimacy, diplomatic recognition, weapons and funds to those responsible for committing atrocities against children.

22. She noted with appreciation the work being carried out by UNICEF for children affected by armed conflict. It had acted as a catalyst in efforts to ensure the adoption of the optional protocol that would raise the age limit for recruitment, and was supporting projects on the prevention of the recruitment of children, the demobilization of ex-child soldiers, the reunification of children separated from their families and the protection and reintegration of children affected by armed conflict.

23. Her delegation expressed support for the holding of a special session of the General Assembly in 2001 to review progress since the World Summit for Children and to consider further goals and strategies, and supported a rights-based approach to development for children. She appreciated UNICEF's need for adequate resources for programme development, and was convinced that Governments must fulfil their obligations in order to realize the goals of the World Summit. However, given the worsening economic crisis, she recognized that capacity-building must be given priority as a crucial strategy in a world of declining resources and decreasing official development assistance. She hoped that the discussions on the economic crisis would lead to acceptable solutions which would have a positive impact on the world's most vulnerable group, and its future, children.

24. **Mr. van der Wal** (Australia) expressed satisfaction at the increasing international attention being given to ensuring the development and protection of all children. Yet children continued to suffer exploitation, abuse and deprivation and new challenges had arisen, such as easy access to child pornography – thanks to information technology – and the use of children in armed conflicts. He urged the small number of States which had not yet become parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to do so as soon as possible.

25. His Government was continuing its efforts to criminalize offences related to trafficking in persons for their sexual exploitation, including the use of minors from overseas and child sex tourism. The practical aspects of such measures had been studied in particular, with a view to ensuring adequate protection of child victims and witnesses.

26. His delegation believed in the importance of coordinated actions at the regional and international level and had provided support for regional efforts in developing countries aimed at raising public awareness of the exploitation of children, including support for the Global Network to End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT), and workshops on the prevention of child sex tourism. It had signed a memorandum of understanding with the Philippines and was discussing a similar document with Fiji. Those understandings facilitated a high level of cooperation between law enforcement agencies and government departments and other practical mechanisms. He fervently hoped that the relevant draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child would be completed for the tenth anniversary of the Convention in the year 2000.

27. He deplored the increasing use of children as soldiers, and his delegation was disappointed at the slow progress being made in developing the draft optional protocol to the Convention related to the involvement of children in armed conflicts. He looked forward to the early completion of a final text.

28. He noted that few weapons were more lethal to children than landmines and said that his Government placed a high priority on demining and rehabilitation programmes and was committed to reducing the humanitarian and economic impact on many countries from the use of landmines. It was playing a leading role in the funding of demining and related activities and intended to be an original State party to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-

Personnel Landmines and on Their Destruction when it entered into force in March 1999.

29. With regard to a matter of deep concern to his delegation, that of exploitative child labour, he felt that the international community needed to do much more to protect children. The new ILO Convention aimed at the elimination of the worst forms of child labour would be a significant development in the long battle against the exploitation of children.

30. In conclusion, he said that since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, protection of children had been high on the international agenda. Significant advances had been made, yet children continued to suffer at the hands of those who should be protecting them. His delegation looked forward to working with the international community to ensure that it would not take another 50 years before the exploitation of the world's children could be eliminated.

31. **Mr. Wenaweser** (Liechtenstein) said that the situation of children in armed conflicts was a multifaceted problem. Children should play no part in such conflicts, whether as combatants or as civilians, and the international community must increase its efforts to alleviate their suffering. Liechtenstein highly appreciated the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. His field visits could be very beneficial for the children concerned if the States and other parties involved carried out his recommendations. It was hoped that the Security Council would continue to give special attention to the issue of children and armed conflict.

32. The continued use of anti-personnel landmines posed a particular threat to children. The forthcoming entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Landmines and on Their Destruction was a very encouraging development. That was overshadowed, however, by the enormous number of landmines to be cleared worldwide. Liechtenstein would continue to give its political and financial support to United Nations efforts in that area. His delegation looked forward to the completion of the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child related to the involvement of children in armed conflict, and considered the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court a historic success. His country stood ready to participate in the work required for the Court to become operational.

33. Since the proliferation of small arms played an obvious role in the victimization of children and armed conflicts, increased efforts in that regard would have a long-term positive impact on the situation of children worldwide. Liechtenstein therefore supported those efforts.

34. **Ms. Schellongová** (Czech Republic) said that her delegation fully endorsed the statement made by the European Union on the item under consideration. The problems related to the involvement of children in armed conflict called for a comprehensive solution providing children with more favourable alternatives for a better life. In that context, she expressed appreciation to the non-governmental organizations that had been active in that regard. The Working Group on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child having failed to reach consensus on the text, her delegation urged the new chairperson of the Working Group to maximize efforts through consultations with the relevant Governments before its next session.

35. Any decision to set the legal age for recruitment and participation in hostilities under 18 years would discredit United Nations efforts to protect the rights of the child. She urged those few Governments that had difficulties with the draft text to reconsider their positions so that the work could be completed. The Working Group should meet at the beginning of 1999 provided it was prepared to focus on the outcome of the inter-sessional period. Her delegation could not accept the tendency to adjust international standards to the domestic law of any State. On the contrary, international standards must serve as a model for domestic law and practice. Her Government hoped that the text of the draft optional protocol would be approved at the next session of the General Assembly.

36. **Mrs. Lacanlale** (Philippines) said that, despite unprecedented achievements in improving the situation of children, the international community was still far from reaching the targets set at the World Summit for Children and of fully implementing the Convention. In the Philippines, children at risk generally belonged to families living in poverty. Underlying factors such as unemployment, family disintegration, and environmental degradation exacerbated the situation of children. Moreover, the financial crisis in East Asia had reduced government spending on health and education services for children.

37. The Philippines had enacted legislation and established mechanisms to implement the Convention. A centrepiece of those efforts was the Sectoral Action Plan on Human Rights for Children, which took a holistic approach to safeguarding children's rights. Together with non-governmental organizations, the Government continued to participate in regional and other multilateral conferences on children. The Philippines had concluded agreements with Sweden and

Belgium to carry out specific projects and continued its long-standing cooperation with UNICEF.

38. Her delegation had a special interest in disabled children, most of whom came from the developing world. Their rights must be fully taken into account in implementing the Convention. Her delegation welcomed the decision of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to set up a working group on the rights of children with disabilities and looked forward to receiving information about the group's work at the next session of that Committee.

39. Her delegation noted with satisfaction the report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/53/311, annex), which recommended action-oriented measures to address the multifaceted aspects of trafficking in children. Many of those recommendations had been included in the draft resolution on trafficking in women and girls (A/C.3/53/L.10) which the Philippines was submitting at the current session. Her country supported the Special Rapporteur's recommendation for the establishment of international standards, together with international mechanisms to ensure reporting and monitoring of State activities. With the alarming increase in trafficking in women and children, it was time to find common ground for elaborating a strong convention in that area.

40. The Philippines welcomed the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (A/53/482, annex) and commended him for raising public awareness and mobilizing political support for protecting the rights of those children. Member States should give serious consideration to his wide-ranging recommendations.

41. The Philippines, which strongly supported efforts to establish new international instruments to prohibit the most intolerable forms of child labour, commended the International Labour Organization (ILO) for its continuing initiatives in that regard.

42. **Ms. King** (United States of America) said that her country was concerned that, in recent years, child labour had been on the rise in many parts of the world and that fear of HIV/AIDS had increased the perverse demand for child prostitutes in many countries. Her Government was expanding its efforts to combat all forms of violence against women and children around the world, including trafficking in women and children. The United States considered trafficking in human beings a very serious crime and was committed to eradicating it. To that end, her Government had focused on prevention, victim assistance and law enforcement, and was working closely with international organizations, non-governmental organizations and representatives of source, transit and destination countries to develop strategies to combat such trafficking.

43. In most cases, trafficking in women and children involved forced prostitution, sweat shop labour and exploitative domestic servitude. That required a comprehensive strategy based on prevention and development. Potential victims must be warned of the danger posed by traffickers. Since most victims lived in extreme poverty, economic opportunities must be provided in source countries, and social development and poverty alleviation were essential. Addressing the economic causes of trafficking was an enormous challenge for the international community.

44. In addition, the strong enforcement of laws against trafficking was necessary; and the role of corrupt government officials in facilitating trafficking must also be addressed. In the area of providing services to the victims of trafficking, Governments could learn much from non-governmental organizations and professionals in the field of health care and social services. More must be done to help reintegrate the victims into their communities.

45. She called upon the international community to redouble its efforts to eliminate trafficking in women and children from the face of the earth.

46. **Mr. Cristobal Tapia** (Chile), speaking on behalf of the boys and girls in his country, said that he wished to thank the United Nations for its efforts to solve the problems affecting children and urged delegations to continue working tirelessly to bring about a world in which all children were happy.

47. **Mr. Larrain** (Chile) said that his delegation associated itself fully with the statement made on behalf of the Rio Group. While he noted with great satisfaction the large number of countries that had ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, he viewed with concern the lack of progress in elaborating the two draft optional protocols to the Convention.

48. At the domestic level, Chile sought to eradicate the cases of child labour that still existed and had received valuable assistance from ILO and UNICEF. Since the return to democratic government in 1990, minors in Chile had been defined as a priority group in social and economic policies. In addition to ratifying the Convention, his country had since 1993 been implementing the National Action Plan for Children, which covered the rights to survival, health, nutrition, development and education, and the right to protection, particularly for the poorest children. In addition

to harmonizing Chilean legislation with the provisions of the Convention, major legal, institutional and educational reforms had been carried out. The modernization of Chile's educational system also aimed to prepare students for employment. Many of the serious problems affecting children were transnational in nature and required a joint approach by the international community.

49. **Mr. Ocazionez** (Colombia) said that his delegation fully supported the statement made on that item on behalf of the Rio Group. In March 1998, Colombia had hosted a regional summit for children of Latin America and the Caribbean, which had adopted a declaration and plan of action to deal with child labour, the sexual exploitation of children, family violence and the situation of children in armed conflict. The Governments represented there had agreed to increase cooperation with civil society and to strengthen the role of the family.

50. His delegation welcomed the report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/53/311, annex). Since Colombia was a major source of children for foreign adoption, his Government was concerned about the increase in illegal activities described in the report. In 1996 and 1997, well over 1,000 Colombian children without official registration with the central adoption centre had been taken away by foreign couples. Cooperation with the countries to which children were taken would enable the Colombian authorities to establish the identity of the persons responsible. As part of the Government's efforts, measures had been adopted by a recently established committee on trafficking in women and children.

51. The recommendations made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in his report (A/53/482, annex) were of particular interest to Colombia, which had long been beset with internal conflict. The recruitment of minors for armed conflict was a punishable offence in Colombia. The Government had established a care and training programme for young ex-members of subversive groups. That initiative was further bolstered by a social network which cared for victims of landmines and attacks, and persons displaced by violence. Colombia was grateful to the various Governments, United Nations organizations and non-governmental organizations which had provided resources to alleviate the plight of child victims of internal conflict.

52. Twenty years earlier, children's issues had consisted mainly of nutrition, literacy, health and motherhood. Nowadays, the evils were sexual exploitation, child labour, war and violence. Times had indeed changed and Colombian children had not escaped the effects of 30 years of armed conflict, drug trafficking, and the scourge of poverty. Colombia was doing its utmost to protect its children as the hope for the future of society.

53. **Mrs. Brobbey** (Ghana) said that Ghana had made certain amendments to its legal code to enhance the rights of children, and specifically to bring laws on children's rights, justice and welfare into line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. New laws had been adopted on the age of criminal responsibility, child servitude, health care and protection of disabled children.

54. In spite of widespread ratification of accession to the Convention, the report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/53/311, annex), presented a gloomy picture. The protection of children was possible only through a conscious effort to ensure that the Convention was implemented. Special commendation was due to UNICEF for assistance to States in their implementation efforts in their preparation of reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

55. She urged Member States to endorse the recommendation of the Special Rapporteur that international standards with regard to sale and trafficking should be set. That would help in establishing a strong legal basis for the prosecution of traffickers.

56. Ghana was also concerned by the situation of children in armed conflict. The recruitment of children as combatants needed to be critically examined. Her Government was pleased that the newly adopted Statute for the International Criminal Court qualified the use of child soldiers as a war crime. It hoped that the working group on a draft of the optional protocol to the Convention related to the involvement of children in armed conflict would arrive at a consensus on the need to raise the minimum age for recruitment and participation of children in hostilities. Her Government welcomed the Special Representative's use of public advocacy, and also his promotion of local value systems for the protection of children (A/53/482, annex, para. 149).

57. With regard to the health of children, she stressed the need for immunization, adequate pre-natal and childbirth services and nutritional-development programmes. Children with disabilities should be given support to live and develop fully. She lauded the Committee on the Rights of the Child for choosing the issue of the rights of children with disabilities as a theme for general discussion.

58. She noted that public sensitization with regard to the rights of children and of practices and norms that infringed

on their development would go a long way in the promotion and protection of those rights.

59. **Mr. Hadjiargyrou** (Cyprus) said that the landmark 1990 World Summit for Children had provided a blueprint for the survival, protection and development of children.

60. Remarkable progress, chiefly in the improvement of medical care for children, had been registered. Nevertheless, primary education had not kept pace with population increase, and illiteracy, malnutrition and the HIV/AIDS crisis required urgent attention. Endemic poverty, exacerbated by the recent global financial turmoil, and violence against children and women presented new challenges to the international community.

61. His delegation fully supported the efforts of international organizations in promoting the human rights of children, and especially the work of UNICEF in behalf of children with disabilities, the eradication of the sale of children and sexual exploitation, the protection of children affected by armed conflict and the elimination of child labour.

62. Since its independence, Cyprus had pursued a policy of promotion and protection of the rights and welfare of the child. Disease, infant mortality and malnutrition had been drastically reduced and in some cases eliminated. In Cyprus, the Convention had primacy over domestic law. Cyprus was also a party to other major international conventions, concerning child abduction and custody.

63. The legal framework for education and child labour had been strengthened. Furthermore, the Government was reviewing legislation to ensure conformity with the Convention. It was engaged in increasing public awareness, strengthening child-welfare programmes and pursuing a more systematic collection of data.

64. Regrettably, children in the northern part of Cyprus occupied by the Turkish military forces were forced to move to the area controlled by the Government to receive secondary education. Greek Cypriot boys over the age of 16 who attended school in the south of Cyprus were not allowed to return to their homes in the north. Furthermore, obstacles continued to be placed on the timely provision of books and supplies for the small number of Greek Cypriot children who attended elementary school in the occupied area.

65. The overwhelming ratification of or accession to the Convention testified to the importance that the international community attached to children's rights. In that regard, States had a duty to intensify common efforts to fulfil the goals of the World Summit.

66. **Mr. Kolby** (Norway) said that the importance of childhood was unquestionable. The wide acceptance of obligations towards the rights of children required follow-up action, and States which had entered reservations contrary to the purpose of the Convention had thereby signalled that they did not accord their children all the rights under the Convention. Those reservations must be withdrawn, as they seriously undermined the protection given by the Convention.

67. The Agenda for Action adopted at the International Conference on Child Labour, held in Oslo in October 1997 (A/53/57), could help to develop action that would gradually eliminate all forms of child labour. Although conferences were important for the creation of consensus and the mobilization of political will, it was firm action that would make a difference to the lives of children. Investment in education, development of legislation and participation of civil society were all key areas that should be addressed.

68. According to ILO reports, the world financial crisis had led to an increase in the exploitation of child labour. The girl child was particularly vulnerable; her lost opportunity for education and the long-term effect of hard work would have a lasting impact on the welfare of her future family. Norway accorded high priority to the fight against child labour, and was encouraged by increased support to programmes over the previous year.

69. Norway was placing the issue of children and the media higher on the agenda. An integrated global communication market had created unprecedented access to information, and therefore children and youth worldwide needed guidance in that regard. Adults should take responsibility for ensuring a high- quality content for young users.

70. Noting the much higher level of awareness of the situation of children and armed conflict, he welcomed the report of the Special Representative (A/53/482, annex) who would play an important role in translating resolutions, studies and workplans into action.

71. It was encouraging that several Governments and United Nations agencies were focusing more explicitly on the needs of children in their humanitarian-relief and development-aid programmes. There was, however, still need to highlight the special needs of children in times of armed conflict. Norway strongly endorsed the elaboration of an Optional Protocol to the Convention related to the involvement of children in armed conflict, and called for a speedy conclusion to that process.

72. In closing, he noted that the Committee on the Rights of the Child had aptly chosen the important issue of children with disabilities as a theme for general discussion.

73. **Mr. Fofana** (Mali) said that in his country, children were the focus of special attention in both the traditional family structure and modern society. Mali, which had co-presided over the 1990 World Summit for Children, remained committed to the noble goals of the Summit.

74. Since 1990, when Mali had ratified the Convention, a number of national associations had been working to protect children's rights and disseminating the text of the Convention in national languages of the country. The Government encouraged the creation of organizations to promote economic activities for poor families and was developing a programme to combat poverty.

75. Work was proceeding on bringing domestic law into line with the Convention, including laws on social protection, child welfare, prohibition of discrimination and the protection of children against criminal acts.

76. The provision of education for all in Mali enjoyed the support of the United Nations system and other agencies. Primary health care had made great strides through such measures as the Bamako Initiative. In cooperation with UNICEF and a number of non-governmental organizations, assistance was accorded to marginalized groups, including children with disabilities.

77. He called the attention of the international community to its role of cooperation with developing countries in their efforts to protect children's rights on a number of fronts. Mali endorsed any initiative which contributed to respect for children's rights. The implementation of conventions on behalf of children and women remained an essential element in the protection of children. The time was ripe to translate the principles of those conventions into reality.

78. **Ms. Van Lith** (Observer for the World Health Organization (WHO)) said that, in addition of the child's right to survive, health was an often overlooked aspect of crucial importance to the well-being and development of the child.

79. Child and infant mortality was still unacceptably high in many areas of the world, with more than 11 million cases occurring annually. Many of the deaths and disabilities resulting from common diseases and malnutrition were preventable. Adolescents were also vulnerable to premature death through accidents, suicide, violence and disease. In the case of both children and adolescents, survivors of premature death often suffered chronic ill health and disability which thwarted the development of their full potential.

80. The new Director-General of WHO had seriously committed the Organization to supporting the promotion and realization of the rights of children and adolescents. It was currently developing a comprehensive plan of action aimed at improving its capacity to integrate those rights into the work of WHO at all levels.

81. Among the activities planned were the development of training and information sessions and materials for WHO staff, including regional and field-office staff, thereby laying the foundation for a strengthened role for WHO in the promotion and realization of the rights of children and adolescents throughout the world.

82. The rights relating to health, as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, provided a practical framework for specific activities. In addition, procedures for promoting and monitoring those rights through the Convention could be a channel for advocacy and practical support for the work of WHO in that field.

83. A fundamental element of that work was to continue to strengthen input into the process of reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Discussions with the Committee had highlighted the need for technical support in the interpretation of data and for recommendations relevant to WHO action. Cooperation with member States and non-governmental organizations would ensure that those recommendations led to improved child-health and survival rates.

84. The promotion of healthy development was one of the most important investments any society could make, and the social and economic costs of failure to do so were enormous. In addition to the tools and skills to guarantee rights in the field of health care, further political support and a willingness to fully address those rights were also crucial. The high annual death toll of children was not only a health issue; it revealed a blatant failure to guarantee the rights of the child.

85. **Ms. Farhadi** (Afghanistan) paid tribute to the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the attention he had paid to Afghanistan in his report (A/53/482, annex).

86. The protection of the children of Afghanistan had been severely compromised during protracted periods of war, invasion and armed conflict since 1979. In recent months, there had been a renewed outbreak of aggression by Taliban forces against the civilian population living in the northern region of Afghanistan. Since July, thousands of families had been massacred, and the sharp rise in the number of orphans

required an urgent response. She appealed to UNICEF for assistance.

87. Under Taliban military occupation, schools for girls were systematically closed, and a ban imposed on their education. Furthermore, the fact that the majority of primary-school teachers were women and were prohibited from working meant that both boys and girls were being deprived of schooling. Other severe restrictions had served to disrupt family life and the work of non-governmental organizations, many of which dealt with child-related issues. However, the Afghan Government had spared no effort in assisting children in the areas which were not under Taliban control.

88. She expressed the hope that the most recent facts concerning the situation in the country would be included in the draft resolution on human rights in Afghanistan to be submitted for adoption at the current session.

89. **Mr. Pedersen** (Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that the Federation's particular concerns were with the continued use of children as soldiers, the needs of refugee and displaced children, the importance of the psychosocial effects of economic sanctions on children and the daily suffering of street children throughout the world.

90. Thousands of children played an active role in armed combat, which exposed them to hardship and violence as well as the threat of death or maiming. Individual Governments and those in positions of authority had a duty to prohibit the direct and indirect involvement of children in such conflicts. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement was committed to ensuring, through its international efforts, that children under 18 were neither recruited for nor involved in armed conflict. Provisions to that effect should be included in the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, while Governments should support the work of the Commission on Human Rights on that issue. Governments should also register children born in territories under their jurisdiction, so that proof of age could be provided and any legal age limits enforced.

91. Refugee and displaced children were among the most vulnerable groups, particularly unaccompanied children without access to food and water, who risked physical abuse or pressure to join armed units. A lengthy process of rehabilitation was required to help them, often long after the conflict had ended.

92. The psychosocial situation of children had become an important element in the Federation's programmes, since the local social and cultural context provided a healing environment for children affected by armed conflict. The use of traditional values and concepts in such programmes was vital.

93. While the Federation made no comment about the political decision to impose economic sanctions, such measures should be taken with due consideration to their disproportionate effects on women and children. In their approach to economic sanctions, States should consider humanitarian aspects and provide relief to vulnerable groups. The Federation welcomed international support for its efforts in that domain.

94. The tragic problem of street children was linked to that of children in armed conflict. By helping street children, it was possible not only to alleviate their suffering but also to prevent their recruitment in combat units. For a long time, the problem of street children had been wholly attributed to poverty. However, the phenomenon was much more complex and could be explained by family dislocation, domestic violence, breakdown of welfare services, failure at school, natural disaster or armed conflict.

95. Action on behalf of children was a matter of protecting their lives and health, so that they could enjoy the dignity to which every human being was entitled. The Federation and its network of member national societies remained committed to protecting children, in accordance with the fundamental principles of the Movement.

96. **Mr. Rustam-Zade** (Azerbaijan) said that his country was a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant international instruments. The rights of children were protected under the Constitution and specific national laws. Its law on the protection of the rights of children was in keeping with all the provisions of the Convention. Azerbaijan's ministries carried out work with non-governmental organizations and public associations in the field of education, social protection and health care for children and adolescents. The Government was conducting work aimed at the adoption of a State programme for the protection of children in order to ensure the full implementation of the Convention.

97. There were currently 400,000 refugee and internally displaced children in Azerbaijan. While the Government continued to provide them with material support in the field of education and health care, there were many obstacles to improving the situation of children. The continuing aggression by Armenia, the occupation and pillaging of more than 20 per cent of Azerbaijani territory and the presence of approximately one million refugees and internally displaced persons as well as the long-standing economic blockade imposed by Armenia against the Nakhichevan Autonomous

Republic of Azerbaijan had placed his country in a difficult economic and social position. In addition, most of the refugees and displaced persons were women and children. As a result of the aggression, hundreds of schools and libraries had been destroyed, which had particularly affected refugee children.

98. The international community must take adequate measures to protect the rights of the millions of refugee children throughout the world. International and non-governmental humanitarian organizations played a major role in that regard. His delegation expressed profound gratitude to all Governments, donor countries, United Nations agencies and various organizations which continued to provide humanitarian assistance to Azerbaijani children. Particular mention should be made of the role played by UNICEF. Azerbaijan looked forward to expanded cooperation with the relevant United Nations agencies and hoped that the assistance provided to it would not be reduced.

99. **Mr. Al-Angari** (Saudi Arabia) said that Saudi Arabia attached extreme importance to children in accordance with Islamic values, which viewed the family as the bedrock of society. Saudi Arabia had established a number of institutions providing for the social, educational, recreational and physical well-being of its children, aiming at helping them to realize their potential.

100. Saudi Arabia appreciated the wisdom and flexibility shown in the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had enabled most States to become parties to it. For its part, Saudi Arabia had publicized its accession to the Convention through the media and had provided government agencies with the text, so that they could adapt their programmes for children accordingly. Saudi Arabia had already presented its preliminary report to the Commission on Human Rights, with qualitative and quantitative information concerning its achievements on behalf of children.

101. Saudi Arabia had been working on behalf of children's rights long before the Convention had entered into force. In the 1970s, it had established a national committee for children's welfare, under the Minister of Education, with representatives of official and unofficial organizations. The committee was responsible for designing a child-welfare strategy to help the relevant agencies improve health care and provide social and educational services, with coordination of the efforts undertaken by various government agencies. The strategy was also aimed at encouraging universities and research institutes to become more involved in children's issues.

102. The rights of children in Saudi Arabia were promoted chiefly through the strengthening of the family unit, encouragement of the adoption of orphans and of those with special needs, and through the development of modern welfare institutions. Mothers and children were accorded priority in health-care provision, with a focus on prevention of gastrointestinal diseases and nutritional education. Primary education was compulsory and all education was free, including that provided to children with disabilities. In the social domain, the Government encouraged adoption and fostering of orphans and the establishment of modern institutions to provide social guidance and protection for children.

103. Disabled children had unlimited support from the Government and from charitable organizations. Centres had been set up throughout Saudi Arabia, employing highly skilled specialists and using advanced equipment to help rehabilitate children with mental and physical disabilities so that they could become productive members of society.

104. **Mr. Al-Malki** (Bahrain) said that Bahrain provided for the educational, social and health-care needs of children in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which it had acceded in 1991. The Ministry of Health had established a planning committee on mothers' and children's health issues, helping to lower the infant-mortality rate among children under five, with a further big reduction expected by 2000. The State also provided incentives for the establishment of children's welfare centres, to protect and provide children with appropriate care.

105. More needed to be done to protect children from involvement in armed conflict, sexual exploitation, child pornography and the criminal networks operating through the Internet. Legal safeguards should be established to preserve children's innocence and dignity and to protect them from repulsive practices that violated every basic principle of humanitarian law. It was fortunate that such practices did not occur in countries which espoused and practised Arab and Islamic values.

106. Bahrain had made legal provision for the protection of children in a number of areas. A committee had been set up to review and update Bahrain's legislation. Abuse of children had to be reported by law, while a special judge had been appointed to deal with cases of abuse. Individuals with a prior record of child abuse were barred from working with children, while suspicious deaths of children had to be investigated.

107. Bahrain had adopted all those measures, since children were the future of the nation and their protection was a national imperative.

108. **Mr. Otunnu** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict) said that he would incorporate the comments and suggestions made during the general discussion into his future work, particularly with regard to the value and importance of country visits and the need for more systematic follow-up. He took note of calls for his programme to play a greater advocacy role with regard to children in armed conflict and of the importance attached to related statements by the President of the Security Council. There was a need to follow up on that initiative.

109. The delegation of Sri Lanka had raised a number of concerns about his report (A/53/482, annex), to which he was pleased to respond. The delegation had wanted to know whether he had intended to place the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE) on a par with the democratically elected Government, as had appeared from his report. His answer was a categoric "no". Some infelicity of drafting or shortage of time may have caused that misunderstanding, but neither in Sri Lanka or in other States did he place non-State groups on the same footing as the ruling Government. He was grateful for and perturbed by the information Sri Lanka had provided concerning the surrender of children for recruitment to fight with the LTTE. He would ask for a full report on that matter, which reflected a larger trend elsewhere, notably in Sierra Leone and Liberia. It underscored once more the importance of follow-up to country visits.

110. Sri Lanka had raised concerns about the implications of his comments on protection of children in the foreign policy of Governments, contained in paragraphs 23, 102 and 140 of his report. He wished to stress that while Governments had primary responsibility for protecting the children under their jurisdiction, there were cases where political will or ability failed. He had raised that issue during his visit to Sri Lanka, praising it for providing services to children, even in areas that were controlled by non-government forces. There were, however, extreme situations where chaos or the weakness of the State prevented Governments from affording the protection required. He further wished to assure Sri Lanka that he believed in the importance of applying political and diplomatic pressure both to State and non-State actors who abused the rights of children in armed conflict.

111. The recommendations contained in his report were of a general nature and therefore could not apply perfectly to any particular situation. Rather, they were addressed to all delegations and Governments for discussion.

112. In many extreme situations, the international community needed to do more than to invoke human rights: it had to take political action. During his visits to countries in conflict, he had noted a universal yearning on the part of ordinary people for an end to the conflict. Governments and insurgency groups bore the primary responsibility for conflict, which inflicted untold suffering on children. Governments should address the root causes of conflict, by eliminating gross imbalances that led to exclusion, marginalization and alienation. In that way, the rights of children could ultimately be guaranteed. He welcomed the comments of the Sri Lankan delegation and looked forward to a dialogue with it and with other delegations wishing to discuss the issues at hand.

*The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.*